MY QUEEN
A WEEKLY JOURNAL FOR YOUNG WOMEN

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MARION MARLOWE'S CLEVERNESS
OR
EXPOSING A BOLD FRAUD

BY GRACE SHIRLEY

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OR,

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By GRACE SHIRLEY.

CHAPTER I.

A MEETING OF FRIENDS.

"Hello! Beg pardon, my friend! I am afraid I was a bit careless! Thought you'd been run into by a steam engine or an automobile, didn't you?"

"Oh, it isn't so bad as that, professor, but it's a deucedly poor way to say how d'ye do to a fellow!"

"What! Howard Everett! Well, I'll be blest! It's just my luck to run against you, old boy; but what a way for a humble musician to treat a critic!"

The two gentlemen who had so suddenly come into violent collision stopped and shook hands cordially under the lee of their umbrellas.

It was a dark, stormy night—even the rain was warm and oppressive. The streets of New York were nearly deserted, for even the crowds from the theatres seemed to have all taken cabs or cars to their different destinations.

Howard Everett, musical critic for the New York *Star,* was hurrying across Broadway after a look in at the opera, while Professor Arden, a pianist of high repute, was crossing rapidly from the opposite direction.

As they shook hands the genial musician did not relax his grasp, but drew his friend slowly over to his side of the pavement.

"I say, Everett, I'm in a deuce of an unpleasantness," he said, hurriedly, "and you are the man who can help me out! I've been trying to see you for a week—but tell me quickly, are you familiar with the Italian language?"

Howard Everett stared as he answered the question.

"I'm a pretty fair 'dago,' or I was once," he said, briefly; "but languages slip from one—I used to be quite a linguist."

He was seeking to read the professor's face, but because of the slouched felt hat and high turned collar he found it an exceedingly difficult task at that moment.

"But what is your scrape, Arden? Count on me to help you," he added, quickly. "A man with a pianissimo like yours ought to

command all the wealth and sympathy of the nation!"

"Thanks, old fellow, but fortunately I don't need either," said Arden, smiling; "in fact, the scrape is an old one. I could let it drop if I would, but there are two people in the world who deserve to be garroted, and it's a duty that I owe to humanity to garrote them."

There was a seriousness in his voice that belied his manner, but as the rain was coming down in torrents, Everett asked no more questions.

An empty cab was passing, and the critic hailed it.

"My house or yours?" he asked, with one hand on the door.

"Neither—let's go to the club," said the musician, quickly.

He gave the driver the address and both entered the cab.

"To go on with my story," began the professor as they started, "these two people that I speak of are in New York City, but what their errand is no one knows; it is safe to say it is mischief, however. When I saw them last they were in Paris, and one of them, the man, gave me cause to remember him. I was in love at the time—a perfect little beauty she was. She jilted me for him, and for some reason or other I never forgave her. Now, I hear that she has been deserted by her scamp of a husband—she is absolutely penniless—perhaps starving—while he and I have enough and to spare. There's the scrape in a nutshell; now advise me, old fellow."

"But I don't see the scrape!" said the critic, slowly. "It seems to be plain sailing, as far as you are concerned. You say the girl married him; well, let her take the consequences."

"But the dog doesn't support her!" cried the professor, angrily; "and, yes, I'll admit it Everett, I'm as much in love with her as ever!"

"Ah! that's different!" said his companion with a sigh of relief. "Now we have got our bearings and can proceed to business!"

Edmund Arden leaned back in the cab and lowered his coat collar a bit. Everett caught a glimpse of his face—it was of the hue of ashes.

In an instant he reached forward and seized his friend's hand.

"Great Heavens, man! Don't take it so hard!" he said, quickly. "Tell me who she is—who he is—who they all are, and if there is anything I can do, you have only to command me!"

"Thanks! I knew you'd help me!" said the professor, slowly. "I knew you'd sympathize if I told you the truth; but, hang it, Everett, I don't see, after all, how you can help me! Don't you see, old fellow, that I have got to kill him!"

Howard Everett started in genuine alarm. It had not occurred to him before that the case was so desperate. The man beside him had suddenly developed a feverish intensity, and his whole frame trembled with violent emotion. It was a time for coolness, above all else, and Howard Everett was just the man to rise equal to the occasion. He felt that a little diplomatic deceit in his advice would be profitable at this juncture; therefore he replied:

"I don't object to your killing the scoundrel if it can be done with safety to yourself and to the woman. The thing is to keep cool and plan a little. What's the use in getting excited, old fellow?"

Edmund Arden controlled himself by a tremendous effort.

"Were you ever in love?" he asked, turning upon Everett, suddenly.

A deep red flush mounted to the critic's very brow, but he looked his friend steadily in the eyes as he answered slowly:

"I am in love, desperately so, at this minute, old boy; so believe me, I can sympathize with you as well as help you."

Edmund Arden leaned toward him, his face softening a little.

"Is it she—the sweet singer whom you praised so not long ago? I heard some talk at the time—they said you were 'dead gone' on her."

"Perhaps I was," said Everett, as he drew his watch slowly from his pocket. "She is a little country girl, as sweet as the morning dew. Not only has her voice the power to charm me into an earthly paradise, but her pure, noble nature has infatuated my soul—I have said it all when I say, 'I love her.'"

As he spoke his manly face lighted up with a radiant smile. He touched the spring in his watch and held it out toward his companion. There was an exclamation of admiration as his friend bent forward and discovered a tiny miniature in the heavy gold case.

It was the picture of a beautiful young girl, her face as sweet as an angel's.

"Beautiful!" murmured Arden, holding it close to his eyes. "And it has gone so far as that! She has given you her picture!"

"No, indeed!" said Everett, promptly, with a little laugh. "She gave the picture to my sister and I confiscated it, old fellow, on the ground that 'all is fair in love and war,' and because I knew if I didn't get it that way I never would in any other."

"What! your case is not hopeless?" cried Arden in dismay.

"As much so as yours, I fear," said Everett, sadly. "Miss Marlowe is my friend, but she does not love me."

Edmund Arden repeated the name absently.

"Her name is Marion Marlowe," said Howard Everett, "and she is the sweetest, truest, bravest and noblest girl in creation!"

It was Arden's turn to reach for his hand.

"Shake, old fellow," he said, grimly, "I see you know how it is! Now, come; we'll have a bite at the club, then I will tell you the plan that I have in mind whereby I mean to avenge the wrongs of my old-time sweetheart."

"I am with you heart and soul," said the critic, cordially, as he put the treasured picture back in his pocket. "When a woman's welfare is at stake you can always count on me. I love them all, bless them, but it is only because of Marion."

There was no reply for the space of a minute, then the cab stopped at the address which the musician had given.

CHAPTER II.

A STARTLING BIT OF INFORMATION.

"I'll omit my own feelings in the matter, old fellow," said Arden, as soon as they were seated in the club cafe, "and will just tell you the outline of the work I have in hand, for I have sworn to avenge Adrienne, the girl I love—I am going to rid society or the world of her miserable husband, and then try to sweeten her life a little in the future."

He raised a glass of wine to his lips and then set it down untasted. A glass of water was brought and he drained it feverishly.

"Listen," he went on. "Did you ever come in contact with a viper, Everett?—a real, slippery, slimy creature of the gutter!—a filthy, uncanny mongrel that preys upon and undermines society! Well, I have—that fellow that I speak of is one. He is a human monster—and he comes naturally by it! I'll not say much about the other, the woman. Neither of us is in the mood to discuss the lowest specimens of the most lovable sex. I'll just confine my remarks to this despicable specimen of humanity—this creature who robs and cheats on principle, and wrecks the lives of the innocent for amusement."

There was another glass of water drained, then Edmund Arden hurried a little with his story.

"He was a gambler when I met him, but of course I did not know it. He tricked me at cards and I put a bullet into him. Then he used my name too freely in the London clubs, and I gave him a horsewhipping. He retaliated by circulating false stories about me in Paris, and by poisoning the mind of my adored one against me, and then marrying her—for what purpose?—to torture me further by forcing me to stand by helplessly and watch him abuse her!"

The feverish light was shining in Arden's eyes, and he seemed to be suffering excruciating agony.

"Think!" he cried hoarsely. "How would you feel, Everett, if you were in my place? Suppose she, Miss Marlowe, this girl whom you adore, were to be put in such a position before you!"

"It would drive me mad!" said Everett, almost springing to his feet; "but do hurry and tell me where the scoundrel is! Who is he and how can I help you to punish him?"

It was Arden's turn to exercise self-control now, for he had succeeded in filling his friend with the fiercest indignation.

An ugly sneer crossed over his face.

"He is here in the city—has been seen at some of the so-called 'social functions.' Of

course. I could expose him, but that does not help her—you understand, Everett, his punishment must be final."

Howard Everett mused for a moment or two, then he suddenly turned to his friend and asked a question.

"Where is she—his wife?"

The musician shook his head.

"She was here," he said, sadly; "but my detectives have lost her."

There was another silence, during which several gentlemen came in.

"Would he know you if he should see you?" asked Everett, cautiously.

Prof. Arden smiled.

"No—it would be impossible," was his answer. "I am stouter—a great deal—and my beard changes me wonderfully."

"And would you know him?"

Everett spoke with the same degree of caution.

"Anywhere! at any time! No disguise could deceive me!" was his friend's impetuous answer. "I could feel his presence without even seeing or hearing!"

As he spoke another group of gentlemen entered, the majority nodding familiarly to those seated at the tables.

Suddenly Arden half rose from his chair and then fell back heavily, his eyes riveted on a slight, graceful form that was sauntering through the room at some distance from where they were sitting.

"Do you know him?" he whispered, as he saw that Everett, too, was watching him. Howard Everett took another sharp glance and then nodded his head.

"I've seen him once or twice. He is stopping with some one at the Norwood, the building where I am living at present in bachelor quarters. I know his uncle, Frederic Stanton, fairly well—a big, pompous individual, who imagines himself a leader in society. But what about him, Arden? Do you know any more than that? I have always considered him a mere slip of a boy. He's been there a month, but I have hardly noticed him."

Edmund Arden had listened to his friend's words with feverish eagerness. When he had finished the musician half rose and extended his hand across the table.

"Thanks, Everett," he whispered, "you have done me a favor already, old fellow! You have told me more in a minute than my detective has found out in a week, for the good-for-nothing fellow never mentioned the Norwood."

"Been bought off, perhaps," said Everett, scowling. "Those fellows are not to be depended on. The best of them are tricky! But you certainly don't mean——"

"I mean that yonder dandy is the very man I am looking for!" was the almost breathless whisper. "That young slip of a boy, as you call him, is the man I am after. He is thirty years old, if he is a day, and he is the best gambler, the poorest fighter and the shrewdest rascal on earth—his name is Luigo Carbonnel, but he has a dozen aliases—no doubt he is count something or other while he is staying with his uncle."

"It doesn't seem possible," said Everett, who was trying hard not to stare at the fellow. "I knew that Frederic Stanton was a 'bluffer,' and that his social standing was very insecure, but I did not dream that he was uncle to a scamp, and to think, his wife is an aunt of Marion's!"

"What!"

Edmund Arden leaned over with a puzzled stare.

"It is one of those strange coincidences of which you sometimes read," said Everett, frowning. "This Frederic Stanton came over here from England some years ago, and during a short tour through the backwoods district of New England he met and married a farmer's daughter. Of course he brought her to New York and established her in a home, and then, like many another silly woman, she threw over her family. You see," he went on, "I had a little of the story from Marion, the rest I have pieced together, bit by bit, from what Stanton has told me; for I confess that I made the 'big windbag's' acquaintance for no other reason but to try and get him interested in Miss Marlowe."

Once more Edmund Arden gave him a questioning look. His enemy had seated himself, and was glancing over a paper, so that there was nothing to be done but try and not attract his attention. Mr. Everett went on to

explain just what his intentions were in the matter.

"You see, she is absolutely alone here in New York," he said, sadly, "and she is so young and beautiful that, naturally, she attracts a great deal of attention. You'd be surprised, Arden, to know what awful scrapes she has been in already! It was in the hopes of inducing her relatives to protect her that I cultivated their acquaintance."

"But do they need any urging?" asked Arden, in surprise. "Surely a beautiful girl like that needs no other recommendation!"

Everett shrugged his shoulders and a sneer crossed his features.

"The Stantons are what we call 'stuck up,'" he said, grimly, "and, as I said, poor Marion has been in a number of adventures, yet she was never to blame in the very least, and always came out triumphant and victorious. But you know what shoddy society people are," he said, smiling. "Well, Frederic Stanton is so 'shoddy' that you can see straight through him."

"Must come of mighty poor stock—the nephew proves that!—a conglomeration of English and Italian!" said Arden, quickly.

Just then the object of their remarks rose from the table where he was sitting, and with a haughty nod here and there, passed out into the vestibule.

"Now I breathe easier," said Arden, with a heavy sigh. "When I am in the presence of that man I feel like a murderer!"

"Tell me your plan, old fellow!" said Everett, quickly.

For the next half hour the two friends had their heads together; then as they rose from the table Edmund Arden said softly:

"And you think she is clever enough to help us, Everett?"

"Clever? Well I should say so!" was the decided reply "I shall write to Miss Marlowe to-morrow without fail and you shall see for yourself how clever she is! Why, there is no game too deep or too dangerous for that young girl once you let her see that it is for some noble purpose!"

"She must be a queen among women!" said his friend, almost reverently.

Howard Everett smiled, but did not answer. There were no words in which he could fitly express his admiration of Marion Marlowe. To him she was "My Queen."

Little did these two friends dream what was to follow their planning, or how important a part this fair girl was to play in the desperate game of entrapping a villain.

CHAPTER III.

A DREADFUL DEED AT THE NORWOOD.

"Well, of all the strange things that ever happened, I do believe that this is the strangest!"

"Dear me, Marion! What is the matter? Why, you are positively pale, and your eyes are shining like diamonds!"

"Oh, Alma, listen! It is a letter from Mr. Everett. You know he lives at the Norwood, where my mother's sister, Aunt Susan, has lived ever since she was married to Mr. Frederic Stanton. Well, it seems he has cultivated their acquaintance of late, and for some reason or other he has been telling them about me, and the strange thing is that they wish to see me!"

"Well, I don't see anything so remarkable about that," said Alma Allyn, smiling. "Any one who had a grain of sense would want to see you, Marion, and of course it is only natural that your relatives should have some interest in your direction."

"Oh, Alma you are such a flatterer!" cried Marion, laughing; "but do be serious and I will read you the letter."

The two friends were seated in Miss Marlowe's room at the Hotel Rosedale, and both were laughing and chatting in gay good humor, when a bell boy brought the astonishing letter.

Marion Marlowe was far the more beautiful of the two, but Miss Allyn made up in style and brilliancy for what she lacked in actual beauty.

Marion was only seventeen, while Miss Allyn was twenty-five, but the young girl was not only tall and large for her age, but she had rare tact and judgment in all important matters.

The two had been devoted friends ever since they met, a few months before, and each shared her confidences freely with the other.

"Well, here it is," said Marion, glancing

again at the letter. "Mr. Everett says that he met my uncle, Frederic Stanton, first, and then by exercising a little diplomacy he managed to meet Aunt Susan."

"Mercy! Are they as exclusive as all that?" broke in Miss Allyn, laughing. "Why, that sounds like an interview with the Czar of Russia!"

"Oh, they are aristocrats or 'society leaders' I suppose you would call them," said Marion, smiling. "Of course, they are not in the very best class, but they affect what they consider 'good form,' and they have any amount of money. When it comes to kind hearts and brains, why that is another matter! Still, I know it isn't right for me to criticise them, Alma; we all have our faults; but somehow I can never quite forgive them. You know they refused to help me in my search for sister!"

"Well, you found her without any of them help," said Miss Allyn, quickly.

She had observed the shade of sadness that stole over her friend's face, and was doing her best to make it vanish.

"You found her, and now she is safely married," she went on, glibly. "She is a sister to be proud of, is dear little Dollie! But about these people, Marion, your aunt and uncle? What the mischief do they want of you? Are they going to adopt you?"

"Well, I hardly think so!" cried Marion, drawing her pretty shoulders up with pride. "I'm sure I can't imagine why they wish to see me, but Mr. Everett is very urgent for some reason or other."

"Oh, I see; he is trying to get you 'in the swim,'" said Miss Allyn, laughing. "Just as like as not they have heard of your beauty and talents, and being childless, they have decided to take you up, introduce you into society, make a 'rosebud' of you, then perhaps they'll take you abroad and marry you to a nobleman!"

"Well, what would I be doing all of that time?" cried Marion, when she could get in a word. "I must say, Alma, you have drawn an extraordinary picture."

"A very ordinary one, you mean, dear," said Miss Allyn, more soberly; "for that is about the outline of a society girl's life—to be introduced, coached, bullied and properly married."

"Heaven save me from that fate," cried Marion, laughing; "but I hardly think my relations mean to do that with me! However, what they do mean is at present a mystery. I suppose I must go up there if I expect to solve it."

"Marion!"

Miss Allyn's voice had suddenly grown serious.

"You don't think they have heard about your making that money, do you? Perhaps they got the story crooked and think you've come into a fortune."

"That would be a joke if they had," said Marion, gayly. "If they do not know the truth, I'll take pleasure in keeping them guessing! I'll never say that it was only five thousand dollars, and that I have spent nearly half of it already!"

"Well, I'd go if I were you," said Miss Allyn, seriously. "For, after all, they are your relatives. If they can help you, let them! It isn't going to hurt them—they can consider themselves honored."

"Oh, I couldn't do it!" cried Marion, quickly. "I can never forget, Alma, how they insulted me once! Why, my blood has just boiled every time that I have thought of it! If I go it will be merely because I think it is right to do so, for, of course Mr. Everett is my friend, and I would like to please him."

Miss Allyn looked at her sharply out of the corners of her eyes. She was almost on the point of asking a question.

"You know he rescued me from that awful opium den that night," went on Marion, sadly. "I shall never forget how much I owe to him."

"Then it isn't love," thought Miss Allyn to herself. "She's just grateful to him—well, I don't wonder."

She was going back over the scene now, and her face had saddened wonderfully. The great gray eyes were so full of sorrow that Miss Allyn could not restrain herself. In a second she was by her friend's side, her arms clasped lovingly about her.

"Oh, Marion dear, don't think of the past," she said, cosingly. "You have only proved by those experiences how brave and pure you

are. And just think of the happiness that there is before you!"

"I know I ought to," was the sad reply; "but do you know, Alma, I seem to have a presentiment to-day—I feel that there is more trouble, more danger in store—and in some way it seems to be connected with that letter."

Miss Allyn shivered at Marion's words, but her naturally gay spirits came quickly to her rescue.

"Nonsense!" she cried, brightly. "Don't even think of such a thing, dearie! Why, I see in that letter a magnificent opportunity! You will not only enter society and fairly dazzle it with your beauty, but you will also be the means of reuniting your family!"

"Oh, if I thought that last I would go at once!" cried Marion, happily. "I have always thought it such a pity that mother should not be friendly with her own sister!"

"Well, here's your chance," replied Miss Allyn, promptly.

There was a tap on the door, and Marion rose and opened it.

A messenger boy handed in a note addressed to Miss Marion Marlowe.

"Another letter from Mr. Everett! What does it mean?" cried Marion as she tore it open. Then as her glance fell on the contents she gave an exclamation of horror.

"Oh, Alma! I told you there was trouble in store! Frederic Stanton is dead! They found him this morning! Mr. Everett has sent this message to say that I must come at once. There is something suspicious in my uncle's death, and here is the strangest thing of all: Mr. Everett wants me to help him unravel a mystery, and especially warns me to be on my guard, for he says 'There is a dangerous game being played up there, and we two'—he and I—'must be clever enough to baffle it.'"

CHAPTER IV.

MARION MEETS A STRANGE CHARACTER.

An hour later Marion arrived at the entrance to The Norwood.

It was a handsome brownstone apartment-house, well up on Fifth avenue, and was occupied principally by small, wealthy families.

Frederic Stanton and his wife lived on the second floor. They were known to be the wealthiest tenants in the building.

Marion's ring was answered by a colored porter, who escorted her across the lower hall to the elevator.

It was very evident that something unusual had happened, for every bell boy and chambermaid in the building seemed to be congregated in the upper hall, and as Marion stepped from the elevator she overheard a low conversation.

"They say the murderer used the poor man's own pocket-knife! Isn't that terrible!" one chambermaid was saying to another.

"And it stuck straight into his heart. He died in a minute!" was the excited answer.

"He dun leab no trace behin' him, whoeber he was," said one of the negroes, soberly.

"He mus' er come an' went lake er ghos' or sumthin'. I was aroun' dese hyar halls all night, an' I didn't hear nothin'!"

"It's some one in de house, sho'," said another colored boy, but by this time Marion had walked down the hall out of hearing.

"Thar's the door, miss," said the elevator boy with a wave of his hand.

It was plain that he was very much averse to going any nearer.

Two men were just coming out of her aunt's apartments. They were both determined, grim-looking fellows, and in an instant Marion knew that they must be detectives.

She tapped softly on the door, which was opened at once. A thin, angular woman of middle age, dressed all in black, stood in the doorway confronting her.

"I wish to see my aunt, Mrs. Stanton," said Marion, politely. "Will you tell her, please, that it is Marion Marlowe?"

"You can come in. She expects you," was the woman's somewhat extraordinary answer. She had the appearance of one who was granting a favor.

As the young girl entered the darkened room she glanced around nervously. It was a relief to see that there were no traces of the recent crime, but she was a little confused by the suddenness of it all, and a great feel-

ing of pity for her aunt was surging up within her.

"We 'aven't moved 'im; 'e's in his own room," said the woman, quickly. She spoke in a peculiar semi-cockney dialect. "Come right in 'ere," she said, as she led the way into a sort of library. "Your aunt is most too upset to see you just now, but if you want to 'ear the particulars, I can give them to you."

Marion shivered a little at the cold, unfeeling tones. She looked up at the woman, but her face was as cold as her voice. She seemed absolutely without any feeling of pity.

"Perhaps I had better hear them from you," said said, finally. "I must know them, of course, and it isn't likely that aunt will be able to tell me."

There was just the faintest flicker of a smile across the woman's face.

"Oh, she don't take it so bad as all that," she remarked, dryly; "but she's a bit hysterical. I fancy I can tell the story more accurately, Miss Marlowe."

Marion nodded her head. She did not know what to say. Of all the strange women that she had ever seen, this one seemed to be about the strangest.

She was trying to decide who and what she was, when the woman anticipated her thoughts by a remarkably candid explanation.

"My name is Mrs. Gregg, and I'm English," she said, curtly. "I'm a lady's maid, nurse, 'ousekeeper, 'airdresser—anything at all that there's a 'a'penny in; but in this case I 'ired out as a sort of companion."

"To my aunt, I suppose," said Marion, as the woman paused for a second.

There was a nod of the head, which was the only answer. Mrs. Gregg evidently had her own method of telling a story.

"I've been 'ere two months," she said again, "and I tell you, they've led me a pretty life between 'em, what with their suppers and dinners, their fol-de-rols and jim cracks—they've kept me busy, you can just believe it!"

"But they have paid you for your services, I suppose," said Marion, grimly. She was beginning to wonder if she cared to talk longer with the woman.

"Can't see your aunt now, so you needn't be fidgetting," said the woman suddenly.

It was the second time that she had apparently read the young girl's thoughts, and almost answered an unspoken question.

"I wish, then, that you would just tell me about uncle's death," said Marion, with dignity. "Of course you cannot expect me to be interested in those other matters."

The woman looked at her keenly. She had small, deep-set black eyes, and as she concentrated her gaze they seemed almost to grow nearer together.

"Well, then, your uncle was murdered in the night," she said, calmly. "I saw him myself in his bed at midnight. 'E was complaining of something, I don't remember what. 'E was always complaining, so it didn't make any difference. I gave him his brandy and water, the same as usual. I was the last person who saw him alive," she went on, coolly, "except the villain who stabbed him to death when he was sleeping."

"And did—did you discover the crime?" whispered the young girl, shuddering.

The woman stared at her a moment as if she was surprised at her emotion.

"No, I didn't," she said, sharply, and with a shrug of her broad shoulders. "His nephew discovered it when 'e went to wake him this morning."

"His nephew!"

Marion repeated the words in genuine surprise. It was the first she had ever heard that he had a nephew.

Once more the woman stared at her, but this time there was less wonder in her glance. She seemed to be aware that she had told some news, and that this time the girl had a right to be startled.

"So you have not 'eard that Mr. Stanton's nephew is visiting 'ere?" she said, calmly. "Well, 'e's been 'ere a month, and 'e's a 'andsome fellow—educated abroad in dear old England, you know. 'E's already cut quite a dash in society, but, of course, this affair will stop all that. 'E'll 'ave to go into mourning now, poor fellow."

She heaved a deep sigh, as if the thought distressed her. It was the first time she had betrayed any special feeling in the matter.

"What is this nephew's name?" asked Marion, curiously.

The door opened just as she spoke, and a young man entered. He stopped in surprise and glanced from one to the other, but his manner was courteous and evinced the most perfect composure.

"Miss Marlowe, let me present Mr. Arthur Stanton," said the woman, quietly. "In the absence of your aunt you will not mind my introducing you; for, as you are almost cousins you should know each other."

Marion Marlowe heard, but for an instant she did not heed. The words, "be on your guard," were sounding suddenly in her ears, and reminding her that she had nearly forgotten Mr. Everett's warning.

CHAPTER V.

A HANDSOME FOREIGNER.

In her bewilderment, Marion almost stared at the handsome young man who bowed with such grace as he acknowledged the introduction. The next moment she had regained her composure entirely and was prepared to greet him kindly in her usual charming manner.

She knew nothing whatever concerning her uncle's family, but it flashed through her mind that she had heard that he was an Englishman, and it was not surprising that he should have a nephew, or that his nephew should see fit to come and visit him.

As she rose and bowed pleasantly to Arthur Stanton, she looked searchingly into his face. There were traces of emotion on the handsome features, and in an instant the young girl held out her hand impulsively.

"Oh, I am so sorry for you!" she cried, sincerely. "You see, I did not know your uncle very well, so I have thought only of my aunt; but I see that you are sorrowing, and I am so sorry, Mr. Stanton."

Arthur Stanton looked into the beautiful face, and his own brightened wonderfully. He was just about to reply, when he thought suddenly of Mrs. Gregg's presence.

"I will entertain Miss Marlowe until aunt can see her," he said, with dignity. "You can leave us, Gregg; we shall not want you."

The woman bowed silently and hurried away. Marion breathed easier when she was gone, for she had affected her strangely.

"This affair is so sudden and so sad," she began sweetly—then stopped, for there were no words apparently that could assuage this young man's suffering.

"Oh, it is horrible! horrible!" he cried, as he began pacing the floor. "Pray, pardon me, Miss Marlowe, but I am completely unnerved. What with the detectives and the coroner and the thousand and one things that I have had to attend to this morning; but I am so glad you have come—poor aunt needs some one to comfort her."

He came over and stood a minute by Marion's chair, and again the girl was struck by his remarkable beauty.

She had seen many handsome men, but never a face like this. It was one of the romantic type, large, liquid black eyes, a slightly aquiline nose, full red lips and a complexion that spoke more of Italy than it did of hale old England.

In spite of herself, she spoke impulsively.

"I should not dream of your being English, Mr. Stanton," she said, bluntly. "You are less like uncle than I am like Aunt Susan."

"My mother was Italian," said he, softly. "I was born in Italy, and, oh! I love that country!"

"And is this your first visit to America?" she asked.

The young man shivered slightly and turned half away from her.

"My first visit and my last—I hope," he answered, absently, then recollected himself and hurried with his explanation. "It seems so hard," he said, with a sigh. "I have only seen uncle once before in my life, and then I was too young to appreciate a relative. Now, just as we were getting to be good friends I lose him—and by such a horrible death. Oh, it is awful!"

"I am sure you have passed through a hard ordeal," said Marion, sympathetically, "and I am so glad we have met and can become somewhat acquainted. Mrs. Gregg says that my aunt is sleeping—I must wait until she awakes. I hope her nap will not be a long one."

"Then you must make yourself comfortable," said the young man, brightening

"Take your hat off, Miss Marlowe, and try to feel at home. I will endeavor to do the honors, for Gregg is an abominable servant."

"She isn't over congenial, is she?" remarked Marion, as she removed her hat and gloves; "but no doubt she is valuable, or my aunt would not keep her—but wasn't that a tap on the door?" she asked as she ceased her conversation to listen.

"Gregg will attend to it—that's all she's good for," said the young man, promptly. "There's been dozens of people running here already. But Gregg takes care of them—I refuse to see any one."

"And aunt—has she seen any of her friends?" asked Marion, quickly. She was beginning to wonder a little at Mrs. Stanton's continued non-appearance. The young fellow was about to reply, when the door opened slowly.

There was a series of sharp yelps as a tiny poodle came almost tumbling into the room, then the fat, pudgy form of Mrs. Frederic Stanton advanced with stately dignity across the threshold.

"Oh, Aunt Susan," cried Marion, springing to her feet at once. "I received a message from Mr. Everett, and I came at once. I am so sorry for you, aunt! Oh, I wish I could comfort you!"

Marion had put all resentment behind her when she entered the house. If she was to comfort her aunt she must first forgive her.

Now she stepped forward impulsively and put her arm caressingly around the black robed figure.

"Dear me, child, don't crush my dress," were Mrs. Stanton's first words. "I am glad you have come, Marion, of course; but, you see, I am too upset to talk with you now. The shock has been awful. I am sure it will kill me!"

She sank into a large chair and sniffed her smelling salts vigorously, while the poodle ran about the room, barking and yelping lustily.

Mr. Stanton sprang forward and got her a foot-stool, and Marion, not knowing exactly what to do, sat down beside her aunt.

"Have you heard it all, Marion?" asked her aunt, becoming tearful. "Have you heard all the details of the horrible thing—how he was murdered in cold blood while he was sleeping peacefully? And to think, we had been out and had had such a glorious evening!"

Mr. Stanton adjusted the foot-stool and then moved softly behind her chair.

As he leaned over the magnificent specimen of upholstery he could watch Marion's face, and at the same time minister to Mrs. Stanton without crushing her sable garments.

"Mrs. Gregg told me something," began Marion, awkwardly—she was astounded to hear her aunt talking so calmly about the horror.

"Lord! Gregg will tell it every which way!" cried the widow, indignantly. "Why, she has already said that poor Frederic had cramps last night, when I know it was neuralgia or toothache! But there! what can one expect from servants, anyway? I would never have hired Gregg if she hadn't been English—and so capable."

"But what have you learned about this matter?" broke in Marion, suddenly. She was trying to control her own feelings, now that she saw her aunt's composure.

"Oh, it is all so dreadful I have hardly had time to think it out," began her aunt. "No doubt poor Frederic had an enemy of whom he did not dream, and to think the dear man was actually a leader in society! Oh, Marion, you should see the lovely notes I have already received! It is so gratifying, don't you know; and then there have been flowers coming all the morning!"

Marion's lip curled a trifle in spite of her sympathy, and her voice was somewhat colder as she answered bluntly:

"It would be far more gratifying to discover the murderer, aunt. If I were you I could not sleep nights until I did. To think of an assassin coming right into your apartment!"

As she spoke she raised her eyes, and her glance met Arthur Stanton's. He was not only gazing at her curiously, but with open admiration.

As their eyes met they stared silently at each other for a minute, but neither could quite fathom the thoughts of the other.

"If there had been any motive," began the widow again; "but poor Frederic was a very cautious man indeed. There was no money

in his room, and the plate and the jewels were all in the safe. Gregg looks after that, and she showed them to me this morning. Not an article missing. It is very mysterious!"

"It is, indeed!" said Marion, slowly. "Did uncle leave a will, do you know, Aunt Susan?"

Only a very quick eye could have discovered a change in the young man's face at her question.

A flash of light showed in his inky black eyes, but he passed his hand over his face and it was gone in an instant.

"Dear me, no!" said her aunt. "Frederic was opposed to wills. He intended that I should have all, and, indeed, there is no one else to share it."

There was a silence for a second, then Marion spoke again. This time her question was addressed to Arthur Stanton.

"But there must be a motive," she said, almost sternly. "Have you no theory at all in the matter, Mr. Stanton?"

Without a moment's hesitation the man answered:

"I believe there was a motive, and I think I know it," he said, slowly; "but as my theory cannot be backed up by an atom of proof, I consider it only right that I should keep it a secret."

"Perhaps you are right," she answered, absently. Once more she was thinking of Howard Everett's warning.

CHAPTER VI.

YOUNG STANTON'S INFORMATION.

"Mr. Everett to see you, madam," said Mrs. Gregg just at that instant. She had opened the door so softly that no one had heard her.

"Oh, I must see him," cried Mrs. Stanton as she rose from her chair. "You see, he is from a newspaper," she explained to Marion; "but for all that, I find he is well connected, and the very best people know him. Then again, Frederic and he were getting to be good friends—their windows are opposite—there was only a balcony between them."

She left the room at once, and her niece and nephew were alone together. It was the chance Marion wanted, for she was curious to know more of Arthur Stanton's theory.

"Do tell me your idea," she said, the minute her aunt had gone. "Somehow I can't help thinking that you must be right. You seem to me to be a person with wonderfully keen perceptions."

"Thanks," said the young man, gravely, "but I am nothing of the sort. Still we must be allies—you and I—and we must strive to solve this riddle together. It is right that some one should fathom the mystery of Uncle Frederic's death, and you can see for yourself that aunt will never do it."

"I see that she is shallow and almost heartless," said Marion, bitterly. "Not a bit like her sister, my own dear mother."

"It was uncle's influence, I guess," said the young fellow, musingly. "I have discovered, Miss Marlowe, that he was a man who made enemies. Further, I have discovered that in spite of his wealth he was a man who owed money."

"Ah! I was sure you knew more than any one else," said Marion, quickly; "but, tell me, did they have a coroner's inquest this morning, and are there any detectives at work to discover the murderer?"

The young man nodded his head to both her questions. He was evidently endeavoring to be as non-committal as possible.

"Uncle was killed by some one unknown to the jury," he repeated, parrot-like, in his musical voice; "and that would probably be all that would ever be known about it if the proprietor of The Norwood and the chief of police had not put their heads together. You see, the police are full of theories," he added, smiling, "and, do you know, they say already that they know the assassin."

Marion caught her breath and her cheeks paled slightly.

"But how can they know?" she asked, very wisely. "Why, if you and aunt and Gregg don't know, how is it possible for those outside to be so positive?"

There was just a little indignation mixed with her wonder now. It seemed to her that there were signs of the police having jumped at conclusions.

Before he answered her question, Arthur Stanton rose and quietly opened the two doors

leading from the room. Marion knew instinctively that he was looking for Gregg, and she wondered if the servant was in the habit of listening at keyholes.

"I'll tell you how they know, Miss Marlowe," said the young man in a whisper. "That woman Gregg is a peculiar creature. In spite of her sphinx-like face, she is no fool; and it is she who has given the police some secret information."

"And don't you know what it is?" asked Marion, quickly.

"I wish I did," was the young man's low answer. "I've done my best, but I am not very clever. Gregg knows more than she will tell, for some reason or other."

"Well, it's very mysterious," said Marion, soberly. "It just makes me wish that I had been born a detective. I would take solid comfort in ferreting this thing out, for of course some one must be guilty, and they should be brought to justice."

"The police say he could not have entered through the window," went on the young man, slowly; "but I was in the room myself by half-past seven. I discovered uncle, stiff and cold in death, and of course the first thing I did was to examine the window."

"And you found it——"

"Locked," was the young man's answer in a lower tone. "Nevertheless, I am sure that the assassin could have entered through the window."

"But the balcony, the court-yard, they have examined all those points, surely?" cried Marion, sharply. She had suddenly thought of her Aunt Susan's words—that Mr. Everett's and her uncle's windows were opposite each other.

Mr. Stanton sank down in the chair that the widow had just vacated, and as he rested one elbow on the broad arm his head sank into his hands dejectedly.

"They have examined everything," he said with a sigh, "the room, the window, the balcony and the court-yard; yet their theory is the same—they say he did not enter by the window; which, of course, points to one thing—that is that the assassin lives in the building."

"That is what the servants were saying as I came in," was Marion's reply; "still, I fail to see why he could not enter and then lock the window after him if he wished to."

"My idea exactly!" said young Stanton, quickly. "Oh, I see that you and I will be able to ferret this thing out between us. Now, if we could only learn whether he has ever had a quarrel—if any one has ever threatened him for any reason whatever!"

"That will be difficult to find out," said Marion, thoughtfully.

"Gregg says she knows of a quarrel, and a serious one," said the young fellow, slowly. "The question is, will she be believed?—she is such a curious creature."

Marion opened her eyes wide and stared at the young man. She could not quite understand such apparent interest in a servant.

She was about to speak, when she heard her aunt's voice.

"She is coming and bringing Mr. Everett with her," she said, with pleasure. "I shall be glad to hear Mr. Everett's opinion—you see he knew uncle, and he may have a theory. Being right in the building, he is bound to be interested."

"Of course," said young Stanton, as he shifted his position uneasily.

The door opened just then and admitted the widow and the critic.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MYSTERIOUS NOTE.

As Howard Everett entered the room he gave one quick, searching glance at Marion, and as his keen gaze met her eyes an expression of relief passed over his features.

He could see that the young girl was mystified and perplexed, but she was on her guard—of that he was certain. As his hand clasped hers he gave her a bright smile, but his words were only the simplest form of greeting.

Young Stanton and Mr. Everett had not spoken to each other until to-day, when they stood side by side at the coroner's inquest, although they had frequently passed each other in the halls of the building. If they felt any special interest in each other now, they did not exhibit it openly, yet it was not long before Marion's sharp eyes discovered that furtive glances were being exchanged, and

this fact only conduced to deepen the mystery.

The widow was verging very closely upon hysterics again, so Mr. Everett took his departure after a few kindly words; but as he parted with Marion he thrust a bit of paper into her hand, which by a clever movement she concealed in her handkerchief and slipped into her pocket.

The young girl's brain was fired with interest now, for she felt certain that Mr. Everett had given her some instructions, and she was all impatience to help unravel the mystery.

She felt sure that there was a reason for her presence there. Mr. Everett had some deep motive for thus urging her to come and console a woman, who, according to Marion's idea, was not especially in need of consolation.

But an hour passed, and she had no opportunity to look at the slip of paper, for her aunt was really suffering with hysterics now, and Marion was more than busy endeavoring to calm and soothe her.

Arthur Stanton left them to go to the parlor, where another batch of detectives were busy making examinations.

Before he came back she had succeeded in inducing her aunt to lie down in the magnificently furnished chamber, whose windows opened upon the court-yard. As soon as her aunt was asleep Marion went and stood by the window. She could see the balcony just outside her uncle's apartment, and then her gaze wandered across the narrow space to another window.

Almost instinctively she knew this to be Howard Everett's room. It was within easy speaking distance of her uncle's balcony.

But could a man step from his window over onto the balcony? She found herself asking the question, and then for some reason or other she shuddered violently.

She turned away and tried to think of something else. Her position in the matter was beginning to look serious. Here she was, plunged deep in a dreadful mystery, and without inkling of the part which she must play in its unraveling.

There seemed to be no one else upon whom her aunt could rely. Her friends were all the same—courteous and civil, but superficial.

"Not a real, true friend in the lot," whispered Marion, scornfully; then she began to wonder whose fault it was, and finally decided that it was her Aunt Susan's.

In the excitement of her aunt's attack of hysterics, Marion had quite forgotten Everett's note, but now as she seated herself by her bedside she remembered it and began to search hurriedly in her pocket for the scrap of paper.

There was a gasp of horror as she found that it was gone! In drawing her handkerchief from her pocket she must have drawn the note out with it! Almost distracted at this result of her own carelessness she began searching the room, moving about on tiptoe so as not to disturb the sleeper.

But the note was not to be found there, so she opened the door, and, closing it softly behind her, made her way back to the library, her keen glance flitting over the carpet as she searched.

Just as she reached the library door she heard the soft rustle of a skirt.

The door was unlatched—she pushed it softly open.

Mrs. Gregg was just before her, crossing the library floor. About the centre of the room she bent over suddenly and picked up something.

In an instant Marion Marlowe was at her side. She had recognized the bit of paper in the woman's fingers.

"Excuse me, but that is mine," she said, as she took it unceremoniously from the woman's hand. "I am greatly obliged to you for finding it for me."

The sweet voice was as gentle and calm as ever, but there was a light in Marion's gray eyes that spoke of anything but calmness.

The servant turned abruptly, her small eyes flashing like balls of fire.

She seemed on the point of making a rude remark, but recollected herself in time, and only bowed coldly.

"My aunt is asleep, and she has asked me to look after things," went on Marion, calmly. "It is time for luncheon, is it not, Mrs. Gregg? I wish you would see that it is made ready the same as usual."

There was another flash of fire in the woman's black eyes. She seemed to resent the young girl's words, and it was evident that she was endeavoring vigorously to refrain from saying so.

Marion paid no more attention to her, but turned away. She had recovered her note and was now most anxious to read it.

As she closed the library door the outer entrance to the apartment was opened and Arthur Stanton stepped in, followed by a gentleman in black. Then came a magnificent casket, borne by six sturdy men. They were the undertaker's assistants on their solemn mission.

Marion shivered slightly and ran on to her aunt's room. The widow was still asleep, breathing as peacefully as an infant.

The young girl was still clutching the bit of paper, but as she tiptoed over to the window she opened it softly.

The words which she read were startling indeed, but they did not in the least explain the mystery of the murder.

Howard Everett had written briefly and almost in cipher, but in a moment Marion understood it perfectly.

"Motive—will. Look sharp. Search premises. Be alarmed at nothing."

This was all, but it was enough for the clever girl. She now had her clew to work upon and they should not find her idle.

She tore the paper into fragments and then put them back in her pocket. She would burn them later when she saw an opportunity.

Then for just about five minutes she sat down and thought deeply, and this act proved conclusively that she realized the responsibility of her position.

When she had thought it all out, Marion arose to act. She was about to leave the room, when her aunt suddenly awakened.

"What time is it, Marion?" she asked in a whining voice. "Do please tell Gregg to hurry. It is certainly time for luncheon."

"Will you have yours in here?" asked Marion, quickly. It had occurred to her that by this means she could secure another *tête-à-tête* with Arthur Stanton.

"Just as you say, child," was the peevish answer. "You must take care of me now; there is no one else. Dear, dear, I almost wish I could see your mother!"

In an instant Marion's arms were about her aunt.

"Do you mean that, aunt? Would you really like to see mother?" she asked, eagerly.

Mrs. Stanton sniffed a moment and then moved a little uneasily.

"I suppose she dresses as dowdy as ever," she said, slowly. "Dear, no, it wouldn't do. Martha would only disgrace me if she came here."

Marion's arm dropped from her aunt's shoulder, and she drew back instantly. There was a scornful smile on the beautiful lips, but by a wonderful effort she kept herself from answering. The tinkle of a silver bell came as a welcome relief.

"I will send Gregg in with your luncheon," she said, coldly. "I am sure it will be better for you to be quiet, Aunt Susan."

Outside of the door Marion clenched her hands together.

"Oh, I would go home this minute if I could," she whispered fiercely, "but I must not do it—I must stay and help my friend Mr. Everett."

CHAPTER VIII.

MARION MAKES A BEGINNING.

As Marion sat down at the luncheon table exactly opposite Arthur Stanton she could not help noticing how old and haggard he was looking.

Almost in a few hours his face had become drawn and pale, and his magnificent black eyes were dull and heavy.

"The worst is over, is it not?" she asked, encouragingly. "I saw the undertaker come. I suppose we can now have the funeral?"

"Yes, the red tape is at an end, I suppose," was the somewhat sarcastic answer. "They had the inquest and found out nothing. Now we are at liberty to bury my poor uncle's remains and then trust to luck to catch his murderer."

Marion looked at him sharply; there was genuine disgust in his voice.

Either Arthur Stanton felt very deeply or he was a clever actor.

Mrs. Gregg came in just then, with the

maid-servant behind her. They were both laden with viands, which they placed noiselessly upon the table.

Marion was keenly alive to this woman's presence now. Without appearing to do so, she watched her every movement. As she glanced up quickly now she was sure she saw a meaning look exchanged between the woman and Arthur Stanton, but it was done so quickly that she almost doubted her own eyes; and besides, it seemed incredible that such a thing should happen.

A moment later Gregg left the room. She had gone to carry her mistress' tray, as Marion had gently, but firmly, directed her to do.

At last Arthur Stanton and she were practically alone, for the maid-servant had retired to the butler's pantry to await any further summons from the table.

Suddenly Marion leaned a little toward her companion and lowered her voice mysteriously. She had decided upon a ruse through which she hoped to learn something.

"Was uncle's life insured?" she asked, in a cautious half-whisper.

Arthur Stanton raised his head with a sudden start, and it seemed to Marion that he became a shade paler.

"I believe it was," he said, very slowly. "A small amount—something like five thousand dollars."

"Then that would form no motive," she said, with a mock sigh of relief.

The young man looked at her keenly, as though she had set him to thinking.

"You don't suppose a larger amount would have made it any different, do you?" he asked, with an assumed indifference; "for, of course, if he is insured at all it is in aunt's favor."

"Stranger things have happened," said Marion, with another sigh. Her eyes were on her plate now, and she was eating diligently.

"That is so," said young Stanton, and Marion detected a strange ring in his voice.

It seemed to her that, like a drowning man, he had caught at a straw, but why was he so willing to accept her dreadful suggestion?

"Stranger things have happened, indeed," continued her companion, rapidly; "and of course uncle may have been insured for a much larger amount. Neither aunt nor I have looked over his papers."

"But don't you think that should be done?" asked Marion, calmly. "In justice to Aunt Susan, don't you think all these things should be considered?"

Young Stanton looked thoughtful for the space of a full minute.

"She would have to do it—unless—" here he paused a moment—"unless some one could show good cause why she should be considered a suspicious person."

"Well, she slept in the next room," said Marion, grimly.

"And I was two rooms away, and Mrs. Gregg was three distant," broke in the man, quickly; "while Mr. Everett was the handiest of all—he had only to take a step and he would be on the balcony."

To save herself the young girl could not help paling. This sudden knowledge of Mr. Everett's nearness to the scene of the crime was only a sequel to that thought which had crept into her brain as she stood by her aunt's window looking out into the court-yard.

She endeavored to recover herself before Arthur noticed it, but as she raised her eyes she found him watching her sharply.

"Goodness! I hope you don't think that he did it!" she tried to say carelessly, while her heart seemed almost to stop beating as she made the exclamation.

"I don't think anything if I can help it," said the young man, shrugging his shoulders. "I'd rather be excused from doing any thinking at present. You see, I'm all upset and as nervous as a woman. I'm not used to murders," he added, trying to speak lightly.

"I guess none of us are," was Marion's low answer; "but we are facing one now, and we must not be cowards."

As the last word fell from her lips the young man flinched as though she had struck him. As he laid one hand on the table she could see that it trembled violently.

"I will do my part," he tried to say bravely, but there was a weakness in his voice that was not very convincing.

"Poor fellow, he is either very innocent or very tricky," said Marion to herself. "In either case he deserves my pity."

Mrs. Gregg came back just then and

brought the dessert, but there were no more meaning glances exchanged between her and young Stanton.

Immediately after luncheon Marion returned to her aunt's room. The dressmaker had called, and the young country girl's taste was frequently brought into requisition by the fussy and thoroughly unreasonable widow.

As soon as she could, Marion slipped away. She was eager to begin a search of the premises.

Young Stanton had gone out with the undertaker again, and now all that remained was to get rid of Gregg and the maid-servant.

As Marion entered the dining-room noiselessly she found the two together, but much to her surprise, Nannie, the maid, had evidently been crying.

Mrs Gregg made an excuse to leave the room at once, and the instant she was gone Marion walked straight over to Nannie.

"What is it? What has happened?" she asked, very kindly. "While my aunt is ill I am in charge here, Nannie. What has Mrs. Gregg been saying to you—do not hesitate to tell me?"

For a second the young girl tried to control her feelings, but her emotions overcame her, and she burst out in fresh weeping.

"Oh, miss!" she sobbed, brokenly. "Faith it is an awful sin that I am after kaping on my soul, but I am afraid of her, miss—her eyes are so black and scorching!"

"See here, Nannie!" said Marion, firmly, as she caught the girl by her shoulders, "you must tell me what is the sin that you have on your soul; and remember, I promise that no one shall harm you! Do you hear me? You must tell me; and I swear that I will protect you!"

The young girl commenced to shiver and shake now, and her big, staring eyes were fixed upon the door through which Mrs. Gregg had just vanished.

As quick as a flash, Marion rose and closed the door. As she did so she heard the rustle of a woman's dress and knew only too well that Gregg had been listening.

Without the slightest hesitancy she turned the key in the door and then went back to weeping Nannie.

"Now, child, tell me all—every word," she said, sweetly. "See, Nannie—look in my face, and see if you cannot trust me! Don't you think that I am capable of defending you from that woman?"

The terrified servant did as she was bid. As she raised her eyes to the brave, beautiful face she seemed suddenly to throw off the dreadful spell that bound her.

"Oh, she said she would tell the priest that I did it," she cried, happily; "but you have the face of the Blessed Mary! Oh, I know you will protect me!"

CHAPTER IX.

A VIOLENT LOVE SCENE.

When Marion Marlowe returned to her aunt her cheeks were as white as snow, and her beautiful gray eyes had become suddenly hollow. She moved and spoke in a sort of dream, but every word was measured and every action carefully guarded.

Nannie's confession had told her a great deal, but there was still much to be learned in the terrible tragedy.

The thing to do now was to get Nannie away. She must be put beyond the reach of other influences at once.

Marion dreaded to have her in the house another moment.

Mrs. Stanton was still busy trying on her mourning garments, so Marion had time to put her plans into operation.

There was one thought in her mind—she must see Mr. Everett. It was imperative that he should immediately hear what she had to tell.

Standing alone in the library, she tried to think how she could see him. It would hardly do to go to his door, and she could think of no plausible message to send to him.

As she stood in deep meditation Arthur Stanton entered. He tossed his soft felt hat upon the table and sank into a chair wearily.

Marion controlled her feelings by a wonderful effort as she, too, sat down in an easy chair almost directly in front of him.

There was no such thing as seeing Mr

Everett now, and she felt a little uneasy when she thought of poor Nannie.

For she had actually made a prisoner of the little Irish girl, who, strange to relate, had not made a single objection.

"It will only be for a little time," she had told her, as she locked her in her room. "And while you are in here, Nannie, you can be resting, and you are free from that woman."

She slipped the key into her pocket, and there it remained. She was determined to keep Nannie where her veracity could not be tampered with.

"Well, I'm heartily sick of this horrible business," said Arthur Stanton, frowning. "Why, those impudent detectives have nearly bored me to death. Why, one would almost think by their questions that they thought me the assassin."

"Oh, they treat every one that way, I guess!" said Marion, soothingly. "I suppose they find it necessary in order to get at the very bottom of the matter."

"Why, they even asked me all about our family in England," he went on, with anger; 'and one of them criticised my personal appearance, as though a man with an Italian mother was to blame for his black skin. Why, Uncle Frederic himself was not a full-blooded Englishman!"

"What was he?" asked Marion, with no especial interest, but as young Stanton blushed and stammered, her eyes began to sparkle.

"Oh, he was half Welsh, I believe—no, I guess it was German. I forget those little things; but I know he was not a thoroughbred Englishman."

For some reason or other he seemed strangely embarrassed, and Marion found herself wondering if he had acted in that manner before the detectives.

It did not occur to her that it was her own eyes that were to blame; that those magnificent orbs cast a sort of hypnotic influence over men and made it almost impossible for them to conceal anything from her.

"Detectives are brutes," said the young man again; "but if they only knew it, they are a lot of dull-witted fellows."

There was just a shade of pride in his voice, and Marion detected it. Almost instinctively it came to her that in some way this young man had outwitted them.

"You mean that you did not give them very much satisfaction in their questions, I suppose?" she said, sweetly. "Well, I suppose that is natural. One always resents inquisitiveness."

"Well, the fact is, I did not know how to answer many of them," said he, with a sudden burst of confidence. "And 'where ignorance is bliss, it is folly to be wise.' These clever sleuth-hounds will have to go across the water to get the details they want in regard to the family."

The young girl's eyes were beginning to bewitch him now, and as he gazed at her pretty face he moved his chair a little nearer.

"Do you know what I would like to do?" he asked, softly. "I'd like to get clear of all this and go back to England. Of course, it wouldn't be right for me to go before the funeral, but I've a notion to skip just as soon as it is over, and—by the way, Miss Marlowe, have you ever crossed the water?"

It was a sudden transition, but Marion's self-control did not desert her. She looked into the eager face calmly, and even smiled more sweetly than ever.

"No, indeed. I have never been on a steamship," she said, brightly; "but it has been one of my ambitions all of my life. I used to wish it in the daisy chains that I made in the country. I always wished to go abroad, just as I wished to be famous."

"Well, why shouldn't you go?" asked the young man, suddenly. "You and I are almost cousins—I will take you, Marion."

He said the words softly, his great, black eyes softening as he spoke. There was something insidiously fascinating in the change in his manner.

"Dear me, how shocking!" cried Marion, gayly. "Why, we are not cousins at all—only relatives by marriage, and that is really no relation."

"Well, you could have a chaperon," urged the young man, even more gently; "an old married lady to look after you, you know. Oh, do say you will go; it will make me so happy, Marion!"

It was the second time that he had called

her by her name, and a moment later he took her hand in his, caressingly.

Almost in a dream, Marion sat motionless and listening. There was a musical tone in his voice that was wondrously alluring.

"Come!—say you will go, little cousin," he pleaded again. "I have money enough for both, and you can come back when you wish! Come with me and visit my sunny Italy! Oh, it is a glorious clime—so warm, so delicious! I admire old England, but I adore my Italy!"

Marion's breath was growing a bit shorter now, for the spell of this man's beauty seemed to be upon her.

She wondered how it was that she could feel as she did. She had not known him a day, and yet she had to admit that she liked him.

There was a sudden, swift movement of the dark, curly head, and in another second Arthur Stanton had touched his lips to her hand from an impulse which Marion knew was not cousinly.

"You are magnificent," he murmured, as he looked boldly into her eyes. "I have been so upset this morning that I could hardly look at you; but, Marion—I am an Italian—I am impulsive—and—I love you!"

The impassioned words sent a shock to Marion's heart. She seemed to realize suddenly what this young man was saying.

Here was she, striving, plotting and planning to unravel a dark mystery, and at the same time allowing her eyes to be blinded by the glamour of this man's whispers.

She drew herself up suddenly with a little cry of alarm. The enchanted spell had passed and she was beginning to recover.

"Don't!" she cried, sharply. "Don't speak like that, Mr. Stanton! The fact that you are impulsive does not excuse your words! You have not known me long enough to dare to say that you love me!"

"But I do! I do, Marion!" he cried, catching both her hands in his own.

"I do love you dearly—with all my heart! Look into my eyes and tell me that you doubt it!"

Marion Marlowe turned slowly and raised her eyes to his. She had conquered the last vestige of this man's baneful influence! As she gazed at him fearlessly, a smile of scorn crossed her features.

With a muttered curse the young man dropped her hands savagely.

The next moment he had left her alone in the room.

CHAPTER X.

MR. EVERETT ARRESTED.

"Well, if that isn't the most wonderful thing that ever happened!" exclaimed Marion, as the door closed behind him.

A sudden unaccountable feeling of relief swept over her. It was as though she had ridden herself at last of something very unpleasant.

This young man's nature had been revealed to her in an instant, almost, and a flood of new theories surged through her brain.

What might not a man of his violent nature be tempted to do if there was anything in the way of an incentive to spur him on?

Here again was that ever-present question of motive. She had come back to it now, and could not get away from it.

There is a motive behind every impulsive action. The spirit that prompts every deed is its "motive."

Once more the motive for the murder of her uncle was uppermost in her mind, and the necessity for prompt action set her pulses to throbbing.

She must see Mr. Everett, but where and how? It was a question which taxed her cleverness to the utmost. Suddenly it occurred to her to go in to her uncle's room and peer across the balcony into Mr. Everett's window.

If she was fortunate enough to see him she could attract his attention in some way—then she could write a note and toss it over to him.

The thing was risky, but there was no other solution; at any rate, there would be no harm in studying the possibilities in that direction.

As she moved toward the door, her first thought was of Gregg. She was the one with whom she must be cautious most of all.

Since hearing Nannie's confession she almost dreaded to meet the woman, for, to her

mind, this creature was a dark, designing plotter; one who would stoop to any crime, if she had aught to gain by it.

With this precaution in mind, Marion made a tour of the premises. There was no one to be found—the apartment seemed wholly deserted.

She paused at Nannie's door and spoke to the girl. There was no reply. Nannie, too, had vanished.

A great wave of horror swept over Marion's soul as she turned the knob of the door and found that some one had unlocked it.

The room was in disorder, showing that the girl had left hastily. Marion could readily imagine who had liberated her prisoner.

"Oh, how dreadful!" she gasped, as she realized the full portent of the situation. "How stupid of me to leave her! I should have watched her every minute!"

She ran hastily through the other rooms, but there was no one to be seen; then she opened her aunt's door and looked in eagerly.

"Oh, Marion, do come and tell me what you think of this collar," cried Mrs. Stanton, as she caught sight of her niece; but the young girl had already fled, closing the door behind her.

"Gone, all gone, and my bird has flown," she whispered, wringing her hands in agony. "And just when I was on the verge of solving the whole mystery."

Without a moment's hesitation she hurried to her uncle's door. She knew that his body was there in its casket, but that did not deter her.

In an instant she had turned the knob of the heavy door. It opened without a sound, and Marion stood facing a monstrous pier glass. She was about to advance into the room when she saw something that held her spellbound with amazement, her great eyes riveted on the mirror before her.

The room had been darkened, but there was still light enough for her to see plainly. Mrs. Gregg was in the room tucking something carefully away under one corner of the carpet; the whole scene being reflected in the glass.

Marion watched her breathlessly for a second, then, as she saw that the woman was about to rise, she closed the door as softly as she had opened it. In another minute she was in her own room—the small, cozy apartment that her aunt had asked her to occupy until after the funeral. As she reached this room, she locked the door behind her. She was trembling with excitement and wished to calm herself a little.

"Oh, I must see Mr. Everett! I must! I must!" she whispered, desperately. "I shall have to see him, even if I go to his apartments."

She bathed her face and smoothed her hair, and in a short time she had conquered the violence of her emotions. She felt that she was on the brink of an awful discovery, but her heart was heavy at the loss of Nannie, for it was this girl's information that was needed to back up the revelation that was coming.

There was no one in the wide hall when Marion stepped out into it for the first time since she had entered The Norwood on her peculiar errand.

Not even a chambermaid or a bell-boy was in sight. The house had evidently been disciplining its employees and had wisely determined to put an end to all gossip.

Marion crossed the hall with a firm, decided step. She was desperate now, and nothing could dissuade her.

Just as she reached the door, it suddenly opened from the inside and Howard Everett emerged, attended by two strangers.

As he caught sight of Marion his face grew pale, but his eyes were quick in telegraphing to her a message.

"Oh, Mr. Everett!" Marion began, and then stopped suddenly. In the flash of a second she had understood him.

"How d'ye do, Miss Marlowe! Does your aunt wish to see me? Please tell her I am sorry, but can't come in just now, for, the fact is, I have been arrested and am on my way to Police Headquarters."

CHAPTER XI.

THE FINDING OF THE MOTIVE.

This was, perhaps, the most trying moment of Marion Marlowe's life, but one glance

from Mr. Everett's eyes placed a curb upon her actions.

With just a gasp of horror she turned away. She could not bear to look at him in such an awful situation.

"May I speak to the young lady a moment, officer?" asked Mr. Everett, with perfect composure. "You are quite at liberty to hear what I say, and I do not ask Miss Marlowe to answer."

Marion heard the question, and the words which followed. In an instant she looked Mr. Everett in the face, this time without so much as a tremor.

As both officers bowed slightly, Marion noticed something. It was that Mr. Everett's wrist was handcuffed to the wrist of one of the officers.

This sight distressed her so that she nearly lost her self control again, but, as Mr. Everett spoke quietly and calmly, she recovered promptly.

"I have been arrested, Miss Marlowe, on the suspicion of having entered your uncle's room through the window which opens on the balcony; and incidentally, of course, of murdering the gentleman. It remains for my friends to prove my innocence, and I think I can count upon your assistance in the matter. Of course, my address for the present is immaterial, but I have a friend—Professor Arden—a musician, who lives at the Fifth Avenue Hotel. Any points that you may gain and communicate to him will be used to my advantage—and please accept my thanks, Miss Marlowe."

He bowed politely and smiled at Marion. The next moment all three men had gone, leaving the bewildered girl standing alone and motionless.

But Marion was not the woman to long remain inactive. Mr. Everett's freedom now depended upon his friends, and she was one of them.

If she could only have seen him alone for just a moment! She felt sure that the news she had for him would have kept him from being arrested. As she walked swiftly back to her aunt's door, she met Mrs. Gregg just going out. Marion schooled herself to speak to the woman pleasantly

"Nannie has run away, I fear," she said, quietly. "Have you any idea where she would be likely to go?"

A faint smile crossed the sharp features of Mrs. Gregg as she answered:

"Don't know anything about 'er, Miss Marlowe. H'ain't set eyes on the girl since you saw us in the dining-room."

"I hope she comes back in time for dinner," was Marion's only reply. "Aunt is hardly in a condition at present to be engaging new servants."

She was prompted by a double reason in making this remark. It was her desire to make Mrs. Gregg feel as comfortable as possible.

The moment the woman was outside, Marion paused and listened. She heard the elevator bell ring and then the door slammed. For a while, at least, she was rid of the strange creature.

Without the slightest hesitation Marion ran to her uncle's room. In less than a minute she was searching under the carpet where Mrs. Gregg had stooped when her image was reflected in the mirror.

What she found was a large, official-looking envelope. It was heavy with seals and looked very important. There was nothing else, so she hid the envelope in her bosom. It must, she knew, be opened in public, or at least before a lawyer.

The young girl's next move was to don her hat and gloves and then, without a word to her aunt, she quitted the apartment.

This time, as she passed through the lower halls of The Norwood, she noticed more symptoms of excitement than before.

Several guests and employees were about, scattered in little groups, and they were all talking earnestly of the arrest of Mr. Everett.

There was not a sign of Arthur Stanton anywhere in the building. He had disappeared completely after his passionate declaration.

An hour later Marion was standing in one of the parlors of the Fifth Avenue Hotel, talking rapidly, but softly, to Professor Edmund Arden

When she showed him the sealed envelope, he grasped it eagerly. That he was Howard

Everett's true friend was evinced by his anxiety.

"I have been watching that case very carefully," he said, finally. "Mr. Everett is my dearest friend. I felt sure from the first that he would be suspected."

Marion looked at him questioningly, and with just a tinge of resentment.

"I think it is outrageous that they should suspect him!" she cried, hotly, "and all because of that convenient balcony."

"Listen!" said Professor Arden, letting his voice fall even lower. "You see, Miss Marlowe, this murder is part of a deep-laid scheme. Some one had to be arrested, and so the suspicion was thrown on Everett."

"By whom?" asked Marion, with disgust in her voice. "By the employees of The Norwood! A lot of irresponsible servants."

She was so beautiful in her anger that Edmund Arden paused to look at her. He understood fully now what his friend Everett was suffering.

"It was not all done by servants," he said, with a frown. "There is a man at the bottom of this plot against Everett, and it is in this envelope, Miss Marlowe, that we shall find his motive."

"Oh, do you think so, sir?" cried Marion, quickly. "Then, whatever it is, that woman, Mrs. Gregg, knows it."

Before her companion could reply, two gentlemen entered the parlor. They looked sharply at Arden and Marion, and then came over and greeted him.

"Detectives and Everett's friends," said the professor, in a whisper; then he turned and introduced both men to Marion.

"This is our ally, men," he said, in a low voice. "Miss Marlowe is a better detective than any of you. She has not only wrung a confession from the servant girl, who was employed by Frederick Stanton, but she has found this document under the carpet in the dead man's chamber.

He held up the heavily-sealed envelope as he spoke, and each of the detectives took it and looked at it critically.

"But the servant girl escaped," said Marion, sorrowfully. "I locked her in her room while I tried to see Mr. Everett, and, when I went to her door later, I found that she had vanished."

The detectives looked at each other as she spoke, and, just as she finished, each winked at the other.

"Was her name Nannie Finley?" asked one of the men.

Marion nodded her head, her eyes bulging with wonder.

"Well, don't worry about her—we've got her," said the officer. "The old woman let her out and paid her passage to Ireland, but as it happened I was down at the ticket office when she got there. Instead of going to Ireland, Nannie went to the House of Detention!"

CHAPTER XII.

SOME NEWS FOR THE WIDOW.

When Marion returned to The Norwood it was almost seven o'clock in the evening. Mrs. Gregg was in the dining-room, and the dinner was ready, but, of course, there was nothing to be seen of Nannie.

The young girl went at once to Mrs. Stanton's room and was delighted to find the dressmaker just leaving.

If her aunt had missed Marion at all, she did not say so, for at last she was satisfied with the results of the *modiste's* skill and was fondling her new garments with much complacency.

Mrs. Gregg had already told her of Nannie's disappearance, but even that news had failed to ruffle her serenity.

When the dinner-bell tinkled, Marion followed her aunt to the dining-room and forced herself to speak of Nannie's unceremonious departure in a most natural manner.

"Oh, I suppose she found this horrible thing too depressing, poor girl," said Mrs. Stanton, sighing. "Very few servants care to remain in a home where a murder has been committed."

She uttered the horrible word so calmly that Marion could not refrain from staring. Certainly her aunt was a peculiarly constructed creature—a woman without feeling other than for her own personal welfare.

"Most people would call her heartless," she

thought, as she watched her; "but I must not judge. I am not here for that purpose."

It was Marion's duty to tell the news of Mr. Everett's arrest, and here again she was surprised at her aunt's amazing coolness.

"Dear me!" she said, irritably; "how very extraordinary! and to think that poor, dear Frederic was really beginning to like him!"

"Now what do you suppose he could have had against uncle?" asked Marion, trying her best to conquer her aversion to the subject.

"I'm sure I don't know," was her aunt's doleful answer. "They seemed pleasant enough, but you can never tell. It is possible, though, that poor Frederic owed him money."

"Why, aunt!" exclaimed Marion, now thoroughly disgusted. "You don't mean to say that you think that was the cause! Why, one man might owe millions to another without dreaming of murder!"

"Well, perhaps he was envious or something," suggested her aunt, wearily. "You know Frederic was in society, and Mr. Everett works on a newspaper."

"Nonsense!" cried Marion, who could control herself no longer. "When a man commits a crime, he has a motive in doing it—he either hates deeply and is looking for revenge or he has something to gain by it—either socially or financially."

As Marion spoke she let her eyes wander toward Gregg. The woman was standing by her mistress' chair and listening intently.

"Well, I am sure no one needed to hate Frederic," said the widow; "although I believe he left some enemies behind in his own country. And as for their being anything to be gained by killing him, why, I am the only one who gets a penny by it!"

She spoke complacently, but there was perfect candor in her speech.

Marion would have known by her very words that she was as innocent as a babe, even if she had not had strong suspicions of the guilty parties.

Just one part of her aunt's speech had interested her greatly. It was that indifferent mention of enemies "left behind in his own country."

"But might not some of his enemies have followed him?" she asked, cautiously.

Mrs. Gregg moved suddenly from the table, dropping a dish as she did so. In an instant her mistress was berating her, and Marion's question passed unanswered.

Just as they were finishing the meal, Arthur Stanton came in. He was as smiling, courteous and handsome as ever.

Marion's cheeks flushed when she saw him, but the color was gone in an instant. No one would ever have dreamed by his manner that he was such an ardent wooer—a man whose impulses led him to extravagant words and whose impassioned nature drove all conventionalities before it.

If he loved her now, there was nothing to indicate it. Rather the occasional swift glances from his luminous eyes spoke almost too plainly of an entirely opposite sentiment.

Marion saw and marveled. She could not understand this man. He was unlike any one whom she had ever met in all her numerous adventures.

Not long after he entered she rose from the table and, excusing herself, went abruptly to her apartment.

She felt instinctively what she did must be done quickly. She had offended this man by spurning his hot-headed offer of love, and it was quite apparent to her eyes that he would not forget it.

"Not that I have anything to fear from him," she said to herself; "but his presence is distasteful. I shall be glad to be rid of it."

A moment later her aunt came to her door. "The postman just left this," she said, handing Marion a letter. "I happened to be

at the door, so I thought I would bring it to you."

Marion breathed a sigh of thankfulness as she took the letter. It was fortunate for her that Mrs. Gregg had not seen it.

As her aunt sank down heavily upon one of the comfortable chairs, Marion excused herself and glanced over the contents of the missive.

There was a gasp of surprise as she saw the first words. She turned quickly to the signature; it was from Edmund Arden.

"Dear Miss Marlowe," it ran; "you are a clever woman, indeed. You have found what no one believed was in existence, and that is a will, signed by Frederick Stanton, in which he bequeaths two-thirds of his wealth to his nephew, Arthur."

For just a moment Marion held her breath. As she looked at the widow she wondered how she could tell her.

Then it came to her swiftly that it had to be told, and who else in all the world was better fitted to tell her?

Just at this stage of her reflections her aunt spoke sharply:

"Dear me, Marion, your letter must be very startling," she said, peevishly. "Here you have been sitting staring at it and not speaking for at least five minutes."

Marion folded the letter with a heavy sigh.

"I beg your pardon, Aunt Susan. I am very rude, I fear, but I am ready now to tell you what is in my letter."

"Oh, you needn't, if you don't wish to! I am not very inquisitive, niece," said her aunt, sarcastically. "Of course I expect no sympathy, now Frederic is gone! Poor, dear Frederic; to think that I shall bury him tomorrow! Well, he shall have a stylish funeral, you may depend upon it!"

"Oh, aunt!" cried Marion, in a tone of disgust. "Can't you think of anything but appearances and clothes? Don't you know that a crime has been committed under your roof and that an innocent man is in jail for it at this minute?"

Her aunt opened her eyes and started stupidly at this outburst. There was something in the girl's face that awed her for a moment.

Then all desire to spare this woman passed like a flash from Marion's heart. She was cold, shallow and heartless. She should learn all, and at this instant.

"Aunt Susan," she cried, sternly. "Uncle did make a will! He gave you your third, and nothing more. The bulk of his property has gone to Arthur Stanton!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE DEATH MESSAGE.

There was another arrest at The Norwood within an hour, and Arthur Stanton was led out between two detectives.

So quietly had everything been done that he had not even become suspicious, and the knowledge of the discovery of the will came to him like a thunderbolt.

He threw his handsome head back defiantly when the detective first laid a hand on his arm but when the officer said grimly: "You forged your uncle's signature to that document, young man," his whole demeanor changed instantly, and showed him in his true colors.

Mrs. Gregg had gone out again and her absence at that time was particularly desirable.

Marion felt pretty certain that she had not missed the will, as she had made it a point to watch her movements very closely.

But the young girl's hands were full now in caring for her aunt, for with the first intimation of the truth she promptly went into hysterics

Once more the premises swarmed with grim detectives and each insisted upon hear-

ing Marion's story of how she found the hidden document.

Of course every word was in secret for obvious reasons. Mrs. Gregg must be kept in ignorance until the web was woven securely about her, and once as Marion was speaking, she suddenly changed the subject, so certain was she that the woman had entered and was listening at the keyhole.

Nannie Finley had told her story under a sacred oath, and when Marion's was added to it the web was pretty nearly completed.

It was late in the evening before the arrest was made; then Marion led the way to the woman's apartment.

She had only seen her once during the entire evening; then she seemed perfectly calm, but hollow-eyed and ashen.

"She's took an unaccountable interest in that nephew, it seems to me," said one of the detectives, softly, as they passed through the hall. "When this is all put together it will make a pretty story."

Marion stopped just long enough to ask just one question about the will. It was merely if they were sure that the document was a forgery.

"Sure," said the man who had spoken before. "The young man employed a scamp of a lawyer to draw it up, promising, of course, to pay him handsomely; then he forged the old man's signature and dated it back to within a month of his coming to this country, so that no one could accuse him of undue influence in the matter. Oh, he was fairly clever, I can assure you! Why, he even had letters in his pocket purporting to have come from his uncle and inviting him to this country!"

"And were they forgeries, too?" asked Marion, in a whisper.

"Sure," said the man again. "The whole lot of 'em was forgeries. This young rascal murdered his uncle without a doubt, and then put the suspicion on Mr. Everett, in the hope that he would be convicted and, perhaps, executed, before the will was discovered."

"How would that save him, when the will was discovered?" asked Marion again, in that cautious whisper.

"Can't hang two men for the same crime," said the detective, grimly. "Oh, the scheme was a good one! but too bold to be clever, and where he made his mistake was in trusting the bogus will to the care of that old woman. But it don't matter now, we've got 'em both. You'd have laughed if you'd seen how we scared that rascally lawyer!"

The detective chuckled, but Marion waited no longer. She hurried to Mrs. Gregg's door, for she was satisfied now that the woman was an accomplice.

She hesitated a moment before tapping on the door. There was no sound from within, yet she was sure Mrs. Gregg must be there.

One of the officers reached over her shoulder and rapped lightly; then all listened for a second, but there was still no sound.

"Gone, I'll bet!" said one of the officers, sharply.

He stepped forward and put his sturdy shoulder against the door; it gave way at once and revealed a ghastly spectacle.

Before a small plaster image of the Virgin the guilty woman knelt. Her head had fallen forward in an unnatural position and her face was bluish in the gas light—her body stiff and rigid.

"Dead," whispered one of the detectives, as he drew back in dismay.

"There's a dagger in her heart—she has killed herself," said the other.

Marion darted past them to the little improvised altar.

"See, she has left a message," she cried, as she snatched up a bit of paper from the table.

She held it up to the light and the men both stared at it.

"It's French," said one of the officers, with a puzzled expression.

"No, it's Latin," said the other, as he scrutinized it sharply.

Marion was staring at the words with a strange light in her eyes.

"It is Italian," she said, simply. "Wait, I think I can read it."

She took the bit of paper and read aloud:

"All is lost to us, Ling. They have found the will. May the Saints preserve you. I did it for love!"

She dropped the paper with a little shriek, and her face grew ashen as she whispered:

"Great Heaven, men! The woman was his mother!"

For a second the three stood silently staring at the wretched, guilty creature.

"His mother," she whispered again. "Then who could he be? Surely not the lawful nephew of Frederic Stanton!"

"There's more treachery here than we know, I reckon," said the officer, quietly; then he put his hand on the young girl's arm and led her from the apartment.

"Another case for the Coroner, Bill," he said to his companion, as he locked the door behind him.

"Not a word to my aunt," was Marion's only answer. "Poor soul, she is ill and miserable enough! I will comfort her all I can; but this would be too much for her."

"You are made of good stuff, miss," said one of the officers, admiringly. His companion had hurried out, but he was waiting to guard the premises.

"Aunt is calling me," said Marion, as she heard a faint cry. "Now is the time for me to show what I am made of. She will probably want Gregg, and what will I tell her?"

The officer shook his head. He could not advise her.

"Oh well, I'll get out of it some way," said the brave girl, smiling. "It's a pretty state of affairs when a woman's wits desert her."

"By Jove! she's a daisy!" was the detective's only answer. Marion had darted away, so she did not hear him.

As the officer sat down to wait, there was a tap at the outer door. He opened it quickly and confronted Howard Everett.

"Hello! You out?" was his cautious greeting.

Everett smiled, and handed him a note addressed to Miss Marlowe.

"She is in there, isn't she?" he asked, in a low voice. "I have just got back to my quarters, and the first thing I did was to write a note to her."

The officer drew him into the hall and told him what had happened.

When he came to the woman's dying message he drew it slowly from his pocket.

"Thank goodness for that!" cried Everett, gladly. "At last the chain is complete! This finishes the evidence!"

There was no time for explanations, for the coroner's assistant and the detective were coming up the stairs.

Out of respect for the proprietor, they had begun avoiding the elevator.

Mr. Everett slipped the bit of paper into an inside pocket, while the officer who had shown it to him was busy with the new arrivals.

When he got to his room he took it out again and read it.

"Mother and son," he said, softly, "just as Arden thought. Well, I guess this poor Adrienne will be avenged very shortly. A bold scheme for a man who is both a knave and a coward!"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE CASE COMPLETED.

Just as Everett had said, this ended the evidence, and Arthur Stanton's guilt was promptly established.

It was proven conclusively that he was not Frederic Stanton's nephew, nor any relation at all to the pompous Englishman.

Mrs. Gregg, his mother, was a full-blooded Italian, whose marriage to an Englishman helped to obliterate many of her natural characteristics.

Away back in her youth, Frederic Stanton had jilted her, and the vindictive blood in her veins had not allowed her to forget it.

During her life in London she learned much of his family, and when she came to America, a widow, she sought him out. He was rich and had forgotten her—it was her opportunity for vengeance.

The vicious woman was not slow to develop her plans, and in almost no time at all she was installed in The Norwood.

Then began the plan to rob him of his money. It was a bad one, indeed, but the woman was desperate.

Frederic Stanton had nephews that he had never seen, and it was easy for her to instruct her own son in the family history of the Stantons and then palm him off on the not over-clever man as the youngest son of a younger brother, whom she happened to know had married an Italian.

Frederic Stanton never corresponded with the members of his family, but he was not averse to his handsome nephew's overtures.

This young man, with his striking face, would create a furor in society, and Mr. Stanton would have sacrified every virtue he possessed on that altar. It was Edmund who supplied the most of the information. For over a month he had been cabling frequently to England.

His information was reserved until the last, but when it was given it was overwhelmingly convincing.

But it was Nannie's confession that fixed the actual burden of crime and corroborated the guilty woman's dying message.

She swore that she saw Mrs. Gregg leave the murdered man's room at one o'clock in the morning of that terrible night, and that there were fresh stains of blood upon her hands and clothing.

The horror of the sight had nearly turned her brain, but she was only about half-witted, and Mrs. Gregg soon frightened her into silence.

Then Marion came upon the scene, and discovery followed. She revealed the dastardly plot, which was almost unrivalled in boldness.

No one quite understood Howard Everett's exact position in the matter, but it was apparent to Marion that he had helped to place himself under suspicion for no other reason than to give her time to search the premises and to keep the real culprit as free from fear as possible.

"I did not intend that he should get nervous if I could help it," he told her, laughingly. "You see there were several things that we wished to accomplish, and so long as we could not clip the wings of our bird, we thought it advisable not to scare him."

Then he told her the story of his friend Arden's affection for the young girl whom the Italian had married and ill-treated.

Marion listened with the light of indignation in her eyes, but she never repeated, even to Everett, that ardent love scene in the library.

On the next day following, Frederic Stanton was buried. Thanks to his niece, his body was not placed in the ground until after his assassin was safely in custody.

It was a clever bit of work for all of the avengers, but a stupid blunder on the part of the wicked Italian woman.

The hiding of the forged will was the fatal act, yet, had it not been for Marion's sharp eyes, it might never have been discovered.

Marion went back to the Rosedale right after the funeral. She would have staid if it had been necessary, but her aunt did not need her.

"A rich widow makes friends easily," said Mrs. Stanton, at parting. "They are always so—so interesting, you know. Oh, I shall not be so very lonely, Marion, for of course I have scores of friends who will call; still, I shall be glad to see you, child, if you wish to come and see me."

"I am sure your friends will comfort you," said Marion, with just a tinge of irony in her voice.

The widow sighed heavily and her lids drooped with becoming sadness.

"I shall miss dear Frederic terribly," she said, with a sigh, "for he was really a very good man indeed, and such a shining light in fashionable society!"

Marion turned away after this. A simple handshake ended her duty in that direction.

Mr. Everett came with a carriage to take her back to the hotel. He was radiantly happy over the termination of the tragedy.

"Just think, that 'Dago' trickster and the lawyer will both go to prison for ten years at least," he said to her as they drove along, "and my friend, the professor, is in communication with the wife. She is in dreadful circumstances, poor girl, but, of course, that will all be remedied soon, for as quick as a divorce can be secured my friend will marry her. You see, he was not so famous when he knew her as he is now," he went on. "There was no 'professor,' on his name, and, in fact, no 'Arden' either. These artists have a trick of assuming new names when they become famous, just as critics do, also, sometimes, I suppose I must not blame him."

"I am sure he is a noble fellow!" cried Marion, enthusiastically. "I could see that he was your friend the moment he spoke of you."

"I am fortunate in having good friends," said the critic, smiling.

Marion looked up and found him gazing at her rapturously.

"Well, I guess you deserve them!" she said, impulsively. "Few men would go to jail, even for a few hours, out of friendship for another."

"I would go to a far worse place for you, Marion," he said, half jokingly; but there was a tenderness in his tones that thrilled through every fibre of her being.

"Oh, don't, Mr. Everett!" cried the fair girl, softly. "Let us be good friends, always, just the very best and truest!"

"As if you could be anything else," said Mr. Everett, gayly, at the same time turning his head to hide the tears that trembled on his lashes.

"True and loyal," repeated Marion, who felt that she had to say something. "That is my motto, I guess; but here we are at the Rosedale."

There was a handshake and a "good-night," and the two friends parted.

Another tragedy had been enacted in which Marion Marlowe took a part and, as usual, its termination found her firm, unspotted and victorious.

THE END.

Our next issue (No. 9 of MY QUEEN) will detail another startling experience in the life of Marion Marlowe. Her success as an amateur detective in the Stanton case renders it certain that "Marion Marlowe's Skill, or, A Week as a Private Detective," will be well worth reading.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

BY GRACE SHIRLEY

NOTE.—This department will be made a special feature of this publication. It will be conducted by Miss Shirley, whose remarkable ability to answer all questions, no matter how delicate the import, will be much appreciated, we feel sure, by all our readers, who need not hesitate to write her on any subject. Miss Shirley will have their interests at heart and never refuse her assistance or sympathy. STREET & SMITH.

"I am a poor girl and work in a dry goods store where I make just enough to live on. I am receiving attention from a young man who frequently makes me presents of expensive candy and flowers and takes me to the theatre. I know he does this because he wants to give me pleasure, but I do begrudge the money he spends that way when I sometimes find it hard work to scrape enough together to buy a pair of shoes. He has hinted several times that he would like to make me a present of money, but I have always avoided the subject, because I was brought up to think that no girl ought to accept money from a man. Won't you let me know your opinion on this subject? LILLIAN S."

If your friend made the suggestion of a present of money in the same spirit in which he makes you a present of candy or flowers you certainly could accept it without hesitation. Tell him that he can give you far more pleasure by providing you with some of the comforts of life than in spending his money on theatre tickets. If you do not want to actually accept money from him, then take him with you when you buy a pair of shoes or a hat and allow him to pay for the purchase. He will probably be more than pleased at your giving him the opportunity to do so.

"Will you be so kind as to tell me whether you believe in hoodoos or in the superstition that cross-eyed people always bring misfortune? I am in love with a man who has a bad cast in one eye, and my people all tell me that I will never be happy. Can anything be done to cure him of his trouble? I love him dearly, but I am very superstitious. A. C. V."

We regret exceedingly that you should be so foolish. Superstition belongs to the dark ages, when ignorance was king. We fail to see what harm a defect in a tiny muscle can possibly bring you. Men with crooked noses and crooked fingers make as good husbands as any, and a man with crooked eyes does not necessarily have a crooked nature. It is quite probable that this defect could be remedied, however, and you might suggest his consulting a specialist on these troubles.

"I am sure you will not refuse to give me a word of advice, even though I do not belong to the sex that applies to you oftenest. I am a young man of ambition, but, alas! I am undersized, and no one will believe that I have great aspirations. I am deeply interested in a very tall young lady. Do you think I would be egotistical in offering her my attentions, or will she be apt to look down upon me literally and figuratively? "JAMES MCV."

We are very glad indeed to talk to young men, and particularly to those who are imbued with aspirations. We do not think you need hesitate to smile upon the young lady, for if she is a girl of shrewd observation she will soon see that your mentality is on a level with her stature, and she may even find that she has to look up to you. Go on and work out your lofty ambitions, and no girl, even though she be a giantess, will dream of looking down on you

---

"I am very deeply in love with a pleasant young man, but every time I go to dinner with him he shocks my sense of etiquette by eating with his knife, and not using his napkin. Am I foolish to take any notice of this? He is a very good young man, both upright and honorable. "L. V. C."

We do not blame you at all for feeling as you do. There is nothing much more disgusting than bad manners at the table. We should judge that this young man has never been taught any better, and no doubt with a little tact you can lead up to the subject. If he loves you he will listen and not take offense at your words. These things are trifles in the eyes of many, but to a sensitive, fastidious woman they mean a great deal. We have seen just such trifles produce very serious results. They sometimes awaken hatred and positive disgust, and have been known to produce illness, like nervous prostration.

"I am so excited and angry that I can hardly write, but I must know your opinion on something that just happened. My fiance and myself were riding down town, and the conductor on the car was exceedingly rude to us. My fiance did not say a word, but only sat and looked uncomfortable, while I was obliged in self respect to reprimand the fellow. I do hate a man who is a

coward! We have not spoken to each other since. I await your answer. EMMA G."

If the conductor deserved a reprimand, it was your escort who should have given it. We do not understand how he ever refrained, and if he was an able-bodied man, we are at a loss to understand how he could resist the temptation of punctuating his sentences. There are many conductors who are worse than brutes, but men, both brave and otherwise, seem to dread having words, particularly if they have a lady with them.

"I am engaged to one of the dearest fellows on earth and think the world of him, but he makes us both unhappy, because of his jealousy. He has no reason for feeling as he does, but he is so jealous of me that he cannot bear to see me chatting with another man, even. Can you suggest some way in which I can secure his confidence? I would do anything I could to convince him that he is worrying unnecessarily, and to end this cause of frequent unhappy hours. MABEL G."

Your lover seems to be more unreasonably jealous than the majority of mankind. Such a disposition as you describe is a most unhappy one. Reason with him, and endeavor to convince him that he is indulging in foolish fancies. Tell him that while you may enjoy talking with other men occasionally that it is his society that you really prefer or would prefer if he did not make you unhappy with his insane notions. Preserve your own self-respect, at all cost, and do not let any jealous feeling that has no cause for its being cause you any uneasiness.

"May I take the liberty of adding my 'tale of woe' to the list in your Correspondence Department? I am twenty years old, and have saved five hundred dollars out of my salary as a cloak model for the past five years. A few months ago I became engaged to a young man who has no money, and now he wishes me to loan him mine so he can go into business. If I was sure he would make a success of his business I would not mind loaning it to him, but it would almost break my heart if he should lose it. Kindly tell me what you would do if you were in my place.

"I. F. G."

We advise you to keep your money in the savings bank. Do not loan your earnings to any one, and so put yourself in the same position which you were before you saved it. A man who respects himself will not ask a woman to marry him when he is penniless, and to expect her to help him is "adding insult to injury." No doubt the young man's salary in the past five years has been as large as yours, and there is no reason why he should benefit by your frugal habits. If you had been married and your husband had supported you for years, and then lost his position or money through circumstances which he could not control, the case would be different. As it is, we advise you by all means to keep possession of your little hoard and let him "hoe his own row" before you marry him.

"Please tell me if I am foolish in the following matter: I have been to several matinees lately, seeing the same play each time, and I am completely carried away by a handsome actor. Every time he makes love to the heroine of the play I can feel my heart beat faster, and sometimes when he is facing me I feel that I must call out to him and tell him how much I admire him and his acting. Do you think I am to blame for feeling this way? Is my nature too susceptible, or do you think I really love him? AGNES B."

We are sorry to say that the "Matinee Hero" is a popular idol, that is, among the feminine portion of the populace. Impressionable girls who cannot see beneath the glamor of footlights and tinsel are always seeing their ideals in the hero of the drama. But because an actor has been trained to make pretty speeches in a musical voice this does not mean that he is always an honorable man, a good fellow or a gentleman. We would advise you to discontinue your visits to this particular theatre and turn your attention to some of the real characters whom you meet in daily life whose lovemaking will be spontaneous and not performed on a salary. The average actor does not make a very good husband, so if your "object" is "matrimony," it will be wise for you to look elsewhere.

"Do you think that a woman is happier married than single? I am twenty-three years old and am about as contented as the majority of people. One of my best friends, a man nearly ten years my senior, wants me to marry him and insists that I will be much happier when I am his wife. There has been no engagement between us, and I have never thought that I loved him, although I do esteem him very highly. It seems to me that we are better off as we are, but he insists that marriage would be a benefit to us both. Please let me have a few words of advice from you. PAULA P. J."

If you will look about you at the many unhappy married couples of your acquaintance you will have abundant proof that marriage in itself does not bring happiness. Close association with another person is not a pleasure unless that other person is indispensible to your existence. It is quite true that there is no state so happy as that of being in close relations with the individual we love and who loves us, but such marriages are few and far between.

The performance of the marriage contract should be the result of mutually happy companionship, and not the first step towards it. You are a wise young woman to desire to remain as you are, rather than try such a serious experiment.

Ill-considered marriages are the most prolific source of sin and misery, and the mismated couples and their offspring are a curse to society when they should be a benefit.

A self-respecting old maid is of far more value to the community than an unhappy, discontented wife. Do not think of marriage until you ardently desire it yourself, and do not let the persuasion

of any one cause you to forget your own dignity or your own right to self-consideration.

"I have been a constant reader of the 'My Queen' series, and think 'Marion Marlowe' is a brick! Will you kindly give me her address if she is really a true character, for I think I am the very fellow she was created for! LEO S."

We are very glad to number you among the readers of "My Queen," and the fact that you appreciate Marion is proof that you are really a good fellow. There are lots of "Marion Marlowes" in the world, Leo, but it would not be fair to the other young men if we were to give you our heroine's address. You must find your "Marion" for yourself. When you have found and won her you will have secured a treasure.

"I am only sixteen and am very sentimental. What books would you advise me to read, and what is the best way to secure a nice lover? I shall be very much obliged if you will answer my questions. EFFIE B."

All sentimental girls should read the book called "Little Women," also "The Old Fashioned Girl," and "Faithful Shirley." These are stories of young girls who combine sentiment with common sense, and they are charming models for all young girls to follow. Do not "try to secure" a lover, Effie. Such an effort on your part would be very unmaidenly. Just wait a while and let some "nice lover" "secure" you. I assure you the future will be far more happy. Just think how mortifying it would be to have him remind you some time that you caught him in a trap or ensnared him by cold calculation. It is much better to charm him unconsciously and by your modest demeanor.

"I shall be very glad indeed of a little advice if you will be so kind as to give it to me. I am desperately in love with a very handsome young man who comes to the house, but I cannot find out who he comes to see, whether it is myself or my younger sister. He always asks if 'the girls are at home,' and when he sees one he invariably asks for the other. He has been doing this now for nearly three months. Please tell me what to do to settle the question. ELSIE C. S."

This is certainly an awkward position to be in but we would advise you to absent yourself continuously for a while and see if he persists in calling upon your sister. If he keeps on coming just the same and seems happy in her company you will be pretty safe in thinking that she is his preference. He must be a strange young man to show no partiality; still, you may both be so sweet that he cannot choose between you.

"I have been in the Catskills all summer, and have just returned wearing a beautiful ring which was given me by one of the gentlemen who stopped at the same hotel with me. He did not ask me to marry him, but he did talk very sweet, and now, greatly to my disappointment, I find that he is married. What shall I do? Shall I send back his ring? It is very pretty, and I would like very much to keep it. CORA."

As the ring is not an engagement ring, we do not think you need return it, still perhaps you would feel better not to have it on your finger, for who knows but what it was the property of his wife, and that he had no right whatever to part with it. When a married man "talks sweet" to a young lady his actions arouse suspicion. Unfortunately, there are many of this class, and it is well to beware of them. The man who is false to one love is apt to be to all others.

"I have been deeply interested in the 'My Queen' series, and especially in the columns devoted to correspondence. It is indeed a blessing to be able to go with one's troubles to such a woman as 'Grace Shirley,' for it is plain to be seen that she has had great experience, and is familiar with every class of society. I, too, have my troubles, but I will not inflict them upon others. I only wish to ask one question: How can a woman of thirty, who is disappointed in love, go about making either herself or others happy? Is there any balm for a broken heart, or any relief for an unhappy spirit? E. L. K."

We are sorry indeed to receive such a letter, for it shows plainly that the writer is so oppressed by grief that she has not even the courage to look about her. Don't be disheartened, dear! Remember that others have suffered—in fact, there is suffering all about you, you have only to open your eyes to see it. Stifle your own grief, dear, and choke back the tears. Remember that smiles are precious and, oh, so rare! Take what sunshine you can into the lives of others, and at some time, perhaps when you least expect it, the shadows will lift and the clouds will roll away and you will be able to behold a blessing in your sufferings.

"I should like very much to meet Miss 'Marion Marlowe,' the heroine of the 'My Queen' series, as she is just my ideal of what a girl should be. I am a man of nineteen and would like to get married, but I do not care for any of the silly, giggling, pert and conceited girls that I meet with daily. If you could help me to get acquainted with a girl like Marion I should esteem the favor highly. T. C."

We are sorry to hear you speak so slightingly of the girls you meet, but glad to know that you think so well of Marion. There are many young girls who giggle from habit, but their hearts are all right, and they are well worth your affection. You must not be too hard on the frivolities of youth just because you possess an old head on young shoulders. Let us know, please, if you find a girl like Marion Marlowe.

"I am in serious trouble and fly to you for help. I know that you will advise me for I have read your kind words to others. I am deeply in love—really, I cannot express it! I shall die, I think, if my love is not soon reciprocated. And

there you have the whole length and breadth of my trouble! Pray tell me how to make him love me! I love him so dearly that I cannot live without him! ANITA."

Poor child! Poor Anita! What shall we say to you? From your letter we should judge that you were suffering agony. Can you not stop and reason a little, my dear? Have you asked yourself whether he is worthy of your love, and whether you were not a little bit foolish in giving way to your feelings? Try and calm yourself and answer these questions. You are sentimental and a little hysterical, my dear, and if you let yourself go you will only increase your troubles. Who is he and what is he that you should love him so? Please tell us all about him in a calmer letter.

"There are a great many questions that I would like to ask, but I will try not to deluge you, my dear Miss Shirley. The one that bothers me most is this: Just how much affection should a young girl show to a young man whom she loves, but who has not yet 'popped the question?' After you have answered this I will ask some more, but one at a time, I guess, is sufficient. L. V. C."

The question you ask involves a delicate matter. There are some men who need demonstrations of affection to give them courage to go on and declare themselves, while others would not appreciate or respect such demonstrations. Those matters depend largely upon individual natures, and we think you are wise enough to know exactly what to do—if you were not, you would never have asked the question. We hope he "pops" soon and so end your dilemma.

"I am going to be married next month and my fiance and myself are undecided as to whether it would be wise for us to take a wedding trip. We have not any very large amount of money laid by, and I do not want him to go to any such expense, but he, dear old fellow, says he wants me to have a real good time before settling down. Won't you let me know your opinion, for I am sure you will advise us wisely. LAURA K."

The honeymoon is not always the season of unalloyed pleasure that it is expected to be especially when the newly-married couple lay up memories of trains that are missed, trunks that will not shut, of tiresome sightseeing and all the special troubles incident to traveling. If you add to these the feeling that you really cannot afford the trip you will hardly have the "real good time" that your big-hearted lover honestly intends to give you. Do not start your married life with an indulgence that you cannot afford. Why do you not go to some quiet country place nearby where you and he can stay for a week at a moderate expense, and yet have every opportunity to enjoy each other's company?

You will doubtless find it quite as enjoyable as travel, and much more satisfactory as far as finances are concerned.

"After reading all the weekly magazines, I must say that I like 'My Queen' the best of all. Marion is the best girl that ever lived, and the finest character I ever read about. I have become so interested in reading about her that I can hardly wait for the next issue. ELSIE W. B."

Thank you for your kind words in regard to 'My Queen.' We are always glad to learn that our readers enjoy these stories, and we think you will find future issues even more interesting, perhaps, than those you have read.

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